

Project Profile

Pope Farm Elementary

Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District



Common Area + Collaboration Spaces

Location
816 Schewe Rd
Middleton, WI 53593 USA

Industry
K12 Education

Size
113,000 SF

Completion
2021

Furniture Dealer
Henricksen

Installer
Systems Furniture Installation

Architectural Firm
Eppstein Uhen Architects

General Contractor
Findorff

Photographer
C&N Photography



Library

The elementary schools in the Middleton–Cross Plains Area School District were becoming overcrowded. Using temporary outbuildings as add-on classroom space was no longer working to address the issue, and building an addition on to one of the existing schools would not accommodate the growth needed for the district.

A large parcel of land that belonged to the Pope Farm Conservancy was donated to construct a new school intended to serve grades K–4.

New furniture was needed for all spaces in the new school, and because they were starting from scratch they could create brand new standards that addressed flexibility, accessibility, and collaboration to create a true 21st century learning environment.

“We, along with Eppstein Uhen Architects (EUA), interviewed a number of furniture vendors and we chose Henricksen,” said Bill Eberhardt, Building Projects Manager for Middleton–Cross Plains Area School District.

The team at Henricksen observed teachers in their existing classrooms, and noted what worked and what their challenges were. The spaces seemed cramped and the furniture was not flexible. There was also not much variety of seating for the students who needed alternative options.

Henricksen deployed three different pilot classrooms at the existing elementary schools in the district. This allowed the teachers to test out new ways of teaching, as well as ask the students about what they liked and why they liked it before making selections for the new school. Student and teacher assessment of the classrooms was important to the planning process, as they would be the ones spending the most time in these new spaces.

“The teachers were really open to trying new things and also got feedback from the students themselves,” said Julie Disch, Senior Interior Designer, Eppstein Uhen Architects (EUA).



Cafeteria

Multiple meetings were held throughout the design process and Henricksen would present different furniture and layout concepts based on their observations. “They would get a concept down and then bring in the furniture so we could test it out,” said Eberhardt. “The Henricksen staff is very attentive. They were very patient with all the different choices and costing options.”

The interior of the school was designed around pollinators – drawing inspiration from the conservancy land – and how important they are to human survival. Each grade wing was given a pollinator or plant used by the pollinators to define their area, referred to as a pod. As an example, 1st grade is the humming bird and 2nd grade is bee balm. Those two species really rely on each other. The school uses the conservancy site and the classroom pods to help connect the students to the real-world concepts of prairies.



Pollinators assigned to each grade to define their location within the school

“We picked out ottomans that would create a flower,” said Disch. In the kindergarten wing hexagonal shaped ottomans mimic bumble bee hives. The finishes selected tie into the whole concept of pollinators as well.

In the classrooms there are different tiers of seating, from floor cushions to standing height wobble stools, and everything is on casters so that even the kids can move the furniture.

“The school is really unique because they don’t offer 1:1 classroom chairs for the students,” said Disch. “They have about 15 traditional chairs and then use floor cushions and standing height stools to supplement. They really pushed the envelope when it came to student choice and student preference.”



Overpass

"The children love the novelty of the shape of some of the tables, like the puzzle shape," said Jessica Taylor, Principal, Middleton Pope Elementary School. There are also quadrilateral tables, whiteboard tables, and low tables so students can sit on lily pads on the floor that are very popular for the kids and teachers.

Outside of the classrooms there are collaboration spaces offering additional flexibility and student choice. "The children have the option to use these spaces beyond the classroom and it's really fun for them," said Taylor. "The furniture is comfortable but durable, and feels homey to a lot of kids and lot of the adults."

Allsteel's Rise tiered lounge pieces were specified for these collaborative areas. "You walk by, and kids are laying on different levels as they are reading," said Taylor. "The system is really functional but also really comfortable and it gives kids an alternative space to do their work and engage differently."

In other spaces throughout the school the furniture is on casters to promote maximum flexibility. As an example, the bookcases in the library are on casters so that they can easily be adjusted or moved to accommodate new room layouts.

The teachers and staff have height adjustable desks, and even standing height tables in all the classrooms. The staff, just like the students, appreciate the versatility of the furniture.

"In my office the file cabinets are for storage, but on top is a pad so you use it for seating too," said Taylor. "The multi-function of the pieces is really nice. They really thought of everything."

"The staff is excited and they seem to use the spaces the way we imagined and beyond," said Disch.

"I think it turned out very well and all the staff is happy; it has worked out well for the teaching environment," said Eberhardt.